



Shoreham and Lullingstone Castle and Roman Villa

Distance: 10½ km=6½ miles

easy-to-moderate walking

Region: Kent

Date written: 4-jun-2011

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Refreshments: Shoreham, Lullingstone Country Park

Map: Explorer 147 (Sevenoaks) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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Hills, villages, pubs, woodland, river, castle, Roman villa

In Brief

This walk begins with a short tour of the delightful little town of Shoreham before taking you on a visit to a Tudor castle and a Roman villa (possibly still closed - see text). You then climb high for views before returning to Shoreham.

There are *three* pubs in Shoreham, as well as other places to take refreshment, including the *Mount Vineyard* which is near the church on the east side of the town.



This walk can be “zipped up” with the Otford-Shoreham walk, giving you a very satisfying 25 km=15½ mile “big zipper” walk. Look for the “zipper” symbols.



There are a few nettles on the route, easily avoided and not enough to rule out wearing shorts. Good strong shoes are advisable. Your dog could come too as all the places en route welcome him (except in the Villa).



The walk begins in the car park, Filston Lane, in **Shoreham, Kent**, behind the Village School, postcode **TN14 7SU**, www.w3w.co/monkey.festivity.luck.



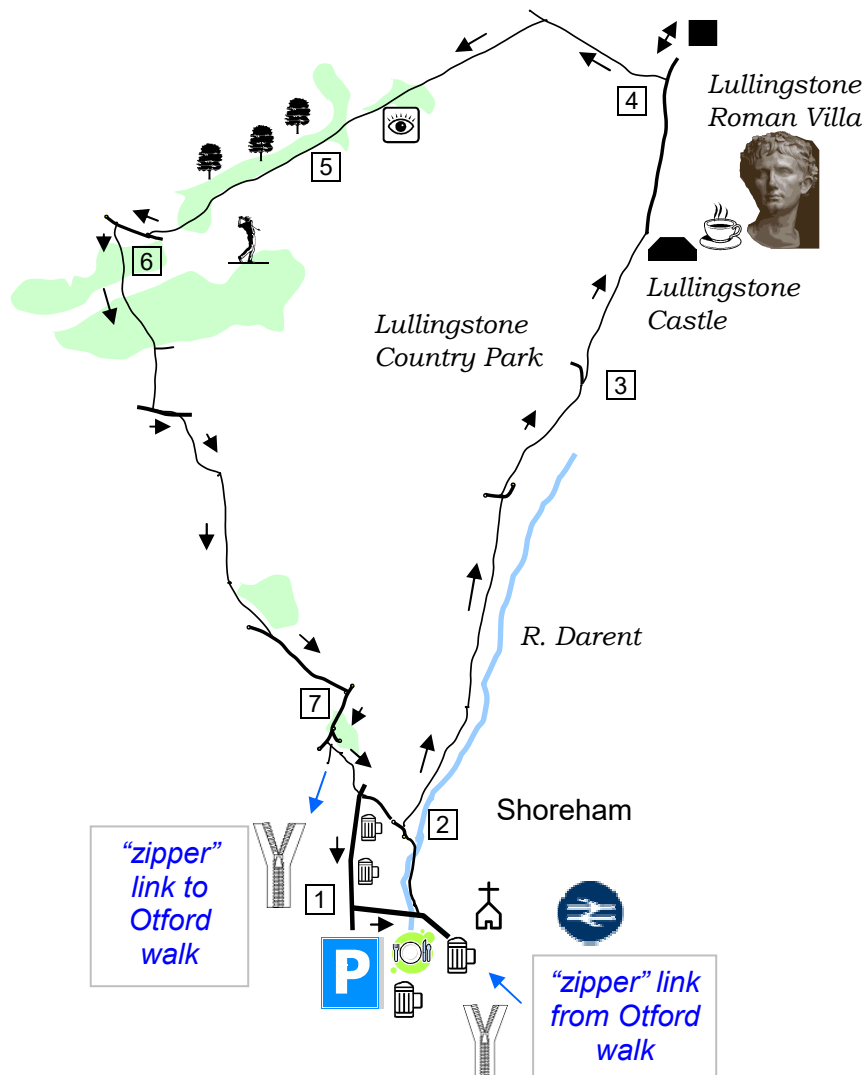
In case the car park is full (with a queue for spaces), there is plentiful kerbside parking around the village. You can also come by **train**, with a short extra hop to and from the station. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).



The Walk



The name "Shoreham" means "settlement by a steep slope". It is well known for its Aircraft Museum here in the village and the annual Duck Race on the River Darent. Shoreham once had no less than four pubs. The small friendly Kings Arms has a small window showing the "Jolly Ostler" who would have served you in past times. In the High Street there is "The Crown". For teas, the "Honey Pot" is at the end of Church Street, just to the right in the High Street.



- 1 Turn **right** out of the car park in Shoreham and, in 100m, turn **right** on the main Church Street through the town. The street passes the *Kings Arms* pub and crosses the Darent bridge at an especially picturesque spot where the road bends right. Leave the road here by turning **left** on a drive beside the river on your left and with *Water House* on your right, where the painter Samuel Palmer lived from 1828. The wide tarmac drive has a meadow-bank on the left and then narrows to a good path, soon passing, on the other side of the Darent, a series of houses with attractive river terraces and gazebos. Turn **left** over a little footbridge and follow the path beside a fence, coming out to a short tarmac drive by the entrance to *Mill House*.



The big zipper from the Otford walk joins here.

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In just 15m, turn **right** on a marked footpath. The main Darent river re-joins you on the right. Go through a swing-gate on a wide path, suddenly with open views, along the right-hand side of a field, with the river still on your right. Next is a metal gate [Aug 2024: missing] with a wide path across the centre of the next meadow. Cross a concrete track to a line of poplars ahead. After another large meadow, you come past a large metal gate to a lane. Turn **left** on the lane for just 2m, go **right** up some steps and continue on a path along the right-hand side of a lavender field, parallel to the lane, part of a MAFF conservation walk. At a gap with a sign, on your right are the various outlets of Castle Farm.

At Castle Farm you'll find "Blends for Friends" (a tea blender) and the Hop Shop. The farm has its own bridge over the Darent at a small water-driven "windmill" and a field of cows taken to wallowing in the river. But principally Castle Farm is a mecca for lavender lovers. It's going to be maxxing out on lavender for the foreseeable future (2023) as it packs the tourists in. It offers "all things lavender", from bunches of the flowers to tea and biscuits. And a nice coffee stall and loos. All this with the amazing fragrance wafting over you!



Continue on the path on the edge of the next field and finally exit through a wooden swing gate by the entrance to Lullingstone Country Park.

Lullingstone Country Park is a nature park run by Kent CC covering a large area with many veteran trees (which you will shortly be seeing). There is a visitor centre with a café, shop and loos. The Park plays host to music and theatre performances.



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Unless you wish to visit the visitor centre, cross over the entrance drive, through a metal kissing-gate and keep ahead on a narrow path beside the river. **On your right soon is a bridge over the river to a nature trail by the big lake on your right, otherwise unseen; but if you'd like to visit this you need to join a supervised group (ask in the visitor centre).** Keep ahead, alongside the river until you go through another metal kissing-gate and arrive on a tarmac lane, shortly reaching the imposing gatehouse of Lullingstone Castle.

There has been a Manor here since the Norman Conquest. The present house and gatehouse were built in 1497 and the Hart Dyke family have lived ever since. The estate also includes the huge lake, Queen Anne's bathhouse, an icehouse, a walled garden and the ancient parish church of St Botolph's. Henry VIII and Queen Anne were regular visitors to the Castle. Lullingstone was instrumental in encoding the rules of lawn tennis during the 1870s. It was home to a silk farm which produced silk for Queen Elizabeth II's coronation robes and wedding dress. During World War II, Lullingstone was also taken over by the British Army.

Another major attraction is Tom Hart Dyke's "World Garden of Plants". This project was the subject of two BBC programmes "Save Lullingstone Castle" and "Return to Lullingstone Castle". The Castle and Garden are open April to October, Saturdays, Sundays and some other days. (Check the website www.lullingstonecastle.co.uk.)

Continue on the lane for another 500m or so, passing some low buildings: the *Bothy* on your right and the timber-framed Lullingstone Park Farm offices on your left. Next, you will see steps on your left with a signpost indicating a footpath. Your route is **left** here. But first you will want to visit *Lullingstone Roman Villa* which is housed inside the next long low grey-green building. [2023-25: the villa is closed until further notice whilst English Heritage finalise their plans for preserving the site.]

Lullingstone is the largest and best preserved of a surprisingly large number of Roman villas in this part of Kent. The ruins were unearthed by accident in 1939 and excavation began after the War after which it was taken over by English Heritage, the special building being constructed to enclose it. The presentation inside is first-class, with lighting, models, audio and excellent illustrations showing Roman (or Romano-British) life at that time. Several large mosaics can be seen, plus a bath house, dining area (or "triclinium") and strong evidence of the coming of Christianity. The villa was built about the year 80 and reached its full glory in the mid-300s. Nothing is known about who the inhabitants were or exactly what their occupation was. The Villa is open almost every day and has a self-serve coffee bar and loos. Entry is £3 (as 2019), free for members of English Heritage.



*Also visible from the front of the Villa is the picturesque **Eynsford Railway Viaduct**. This nine-arched red-brick viaduct was built around 1860 as part of the Sevenoaks Railway. The nine arches of 30-foot span rise to a height of 75 feet above the valley floor.*

- 4 Having turned **left** up steps at the signpost before the Villa (that is, **right** if coming back from the Villa), follow a path through scrubland. The path runs uphill beside a field on the right which, in early summer, is scarlet with poppies. At the end of the first field, ignore an (unsigned) footpath right and continue ahead through a gap, thus leaving the Darent Valley Path. You have fine views right to Eynsford Village, Dartford and the Viaduct. Soon, at a marker-post with arrows, take a path that bends left through a band of trees. The path emerges on the other side with great views, this time south to Sevenoaks. Turn **right** and take the wide path going past a solitary tree up the centre of the field which in early summer is ablaze with flowers on each side. As the path begins to descend, keep straight ahead, going past several posts and between trees. You pass a golf link on the left and ascend. At a marker-post, fork **right** on the wider path, gradually ascending. At the top, you come out into a fine green meadow.
- 5 Keep straight ahead along the right-hand side of the meadow. At the far side, you have a choice of two paths indicated by posts with arrows. Take the left-hand choice, the black arrow, on a path that shortly bends right and goes through a wooden barrier into woodland. (The right-hand option is the riders' path but this one is even more interesting.) You will be staying on this path through beautiful beechwoods for some distance, always just within sight of the greens on your left. Finally, you emerge at a junction of sandy paths, with a golf tee on your right. Keep straight ahead, a fraction **left**, on a path which is in fact the blue-arrow route. You traverse more beechwoods and cross a narrow stony path by a marker-post. Finally, at another marker-post, you come out to an open area with a deep valley on your left. Turn **right** here on a tarmac path. You will notice here the ancient hollow oaks, some believed to be 800 years old. The path bends right and reaches a tall fingerpost [Aug 24: grounded]. Turn **left** here (just before the clubhouse on your right) onto a grassy path.
- 6 Veer **left** by a post under a large oak and veer **right** into woodland, in the direction of the yellow arrow. You emerge onto a golfer's fairway. Go straight over to a grassy path running through bracken on the other side. Follow the path as turns left, then right through bracken and ash trees for about 200m. After about 200m of woodland, at a tall fingerpost, keep straight ahead, avoiding the path left which would go back to the Visitor Centre. Go through a tall metal gate on an enclosed path, past cowsheds on the left. Go through a metal gate, along the right-hand side of a pasture and through a kissing gate,





down steps to a lane. On the right here are the Cockerhurst Oasts. Turn **left** on the lane. In 130m, turn **right** on a footpath by a metal gate near a sign for *Castle Farm*. This concrete track leads past a bungalow and then, by a fence, out to a large field. Continue ahead along the right-hand side of this high field with fine views left as far as the Dartford Bridge. At the end, go through a small metal gate and follow a path that veers left by a fence downhill, eventually reaching a lane. Turn **left** on the lane.

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The lane continues downhill and eventually reaches a T-junction. Turn **right** on Castle Farm Road, signposted *Shoreham, Halstead*. Just on the right here, up a bank, is a gravestone bearing a biblical quote from *Hosea*. Follow the road uphill and, at a junction, keep ahead, avoiding the left turn for Shoreham. In under 100m, before a house, turn **left** at a signpost, past a metal barrier, keeping to the higher path. In 20m, there is a metal barrier and a high path on your right.



Zip point. For the big zipper to join the Otford walk turn **right** on this high path and switch to the other guide.



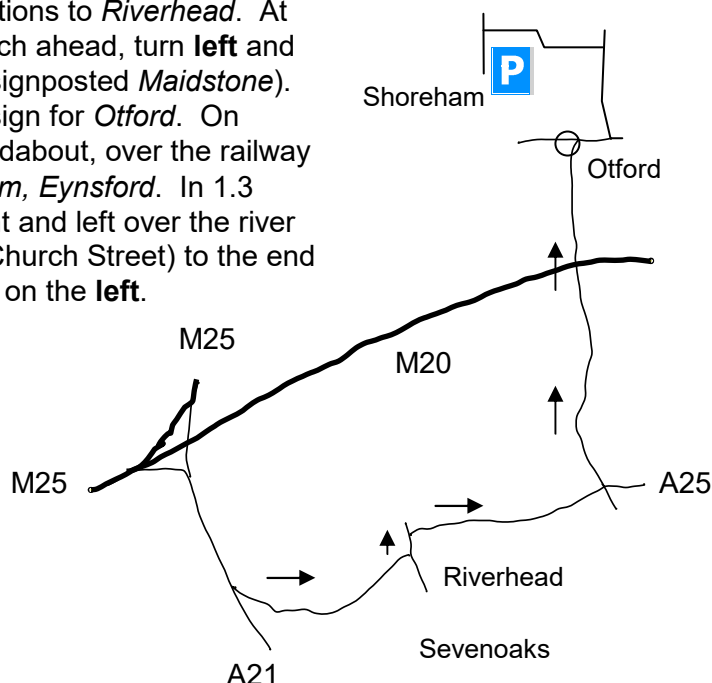
Ignore the metal barrier and the high path and instead keep straight ahead, down through a kissing gate. Descend the left-hand side of a rough meadow, go through a kissing gate on a permissive path, coming down to a road via a small wooden gate. Turn **right** on the road, passing the *Crown* pub and soon the site of what was the *Two Brewers*, now very tastefully converted into a domestic dwelling. You pass the junction with Church Street and, 100m later, reach the car park where the walk began.



There is more to see in Shoreham before you leave, on the other side of the river, including the church and its stunning churchyard, the Samuel Palmer pub (pka the Olde George) and The Mount Vineyard. Shoreham Station is past the church.

Getting there

By car: if coming from the south or west, one possible way is via the M25 near Sevenoaks and through Otford. Take the A21 south and, at the first exit, follow directions to *Riverhead*. At the roundabout with the steeped church ahead, turn **left** and immediately turn **right** onto the A25 (signposted *Maidstone*). At the first traffic lights, filter **left** at a sign for *Otford*. On reaching Otford, turn **right** at the roundabout, over the railway and keep **left** in the direction *Shoreham, Eynsford*. In 1.3 miles, turn **left** for *Shoreham*. Go right and left over the river in Shoreham, follow the main street (Church Street) to the end and turn **left**. The car park is 100 yds on the **left**.



By train: regular **service** to Shoreham on the line from Victoria Station.

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